

## Lycaenidae family

# Chequered Copper

*Lucia limbaria*

**Also known as:**

Small Copper or Grassland Copper

**Abundance in Adelaide area:** Rare

**Flight:** Sep–Apr

**Wingspan:** m 23 mm; f 25 mm

**Mature larva length:** 16–18 mm

Once widespread on the Adelaide plains, this butterfly is now very scarce near Adelaide. Those gardeners living nearer natural areas containing open grassland would do well to grow a patch of its caterpillar food plant, Native Sorrel (*Oxalis perennans*), and encourage ants into the area by leaving some open spaces around these plants. If you do this and are very lucky, this superb metallic copper butterfly may come to breed.

Eggs are laid in batches of between two and twenty on the underside of leaves. Ants soon find the baby caterpillars and within days they are resident within an ant nest except when feeding, which they may do several times in the day, constantly attended by ants. The chrysalis is formed within the ant nest, from where the butterfly emerges after about 12 days.

**Caterpillar food plants:** Creeping yellow Oxalis. The caterpillars eat the flowers and soft green parts of these plants.

**Adelaide native species:** Native Sorrel (*Oxalis perennans*).

**Foreign species:** Yellow Wood-sorrel\* (*Oxalis corniculata* var. *corniculata*).

This small, orange butterfly is rarely seen in the Adelaide region, however it is known to have bred here recently. In the Canberra area, a colony was established in a suburban front garden and thrived there for many years.



It is a distinctive butterfly, with the upper surface of the wings coloured orange in the central and basal area of the wings, with dark brown borders. This brown border area is far more extensive in the female butterfly, which also has more rounded margins than the males.

The underside is whitish in colour with a few small brown and orange spots. The wing expanse is around 23 to 25 mm in size, though occasional larger females have been seen.

This butterfly needs the right ant to be present to form colonies on its chosen food plants, the small Sorrel plants, Yellow Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*) and the Native Sorrel (*Oxalis perennans*). The ants are small black *Iridomyrmex* species, which can be common in lawns and gardens. The ants attend the caterpillars and the pupae are found inside the ant nests.

Prior to the introduction of concrete and lawn on footpaths, populations of the Chequered Copper could be found on weedy footpaths in the south-western suburbs.

